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Sustainable development

Sustainable tourism and sustainable development in Central America

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/207 on sustainable tourism and sustainable development in Central America, provides an update since the issuance of the previous report on the subject (A/68/278) on the continuing efforts of Central American States to implement programmes to promote sustainable tourism and sustainable development.

* A/70/150.



I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 68/207 on sustainable tourism and sustainable development in Central America, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its seventieth session on developments relating to the implementation of the resolution. The World Tourism Organization, as the specialized agency of the United Nations system vested with a central role in promoting the development of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism, took the lead in preparing the present report, which is submitted in response to that request.

2. Early in 2015, the World Tourism Organization surveyed Central American States to monitor the implementation of the resolution, but only Nicaragua responded, the considerable efforts invested in the process notwithstanding. Accordingly, it is not possible to draw broad conclusions for the entire region.

3. The present report, based on the single response received and a brief overview of relevant publications, provides an update since the issuance of the previous report on the subject (A/68/278) on the continuing efforts of Central American States to implement programmes to promote sustainable tourism and sustainable development.

4. According to the *World Tourism Barometer* (April 2015), international tourism in Central America has grown significantly in recent years. In 2013, the region received almost 9 million international tourists who generated \$9 billion in revenue, up from 4.3 million arrivals and \$3 billion in revenue in 2000. In 2014, destinations such as Costa Rica, El Salvador and Nicaragua recorded growth of 4 per cent in international arrivals compared with 2013, while Honduras reported growth of 5 per cent, Belize 6 per cent and Guatemala and Panama 3 per cent. Consequently, overall arrivals grew at double the rate recorded in 2013, well above the global average.

5. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2012, Heads of State and Government adopted a 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns as a global framework for action to enhance international cooperation to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production in developed and developing countries. A sustainable tourism programme was one of the five initial programmes approved at the Conference under the 10-year framework and is of crucial importance to achieving global sustainability for the tourism sector over the coming decade. It is an important mechanism to support the implementation of regional strategies on sustainable consumption and production and to scale up and replicate good practices and successful sustainable tourism initiatives at the national and regional levels with a view to ensuring that tourism contributes effectively to sustainable development, all within the framework of the proposed sustainable development goals, especially targets 8.9 (by 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products), 12.b (develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products) and 14.7 (by 2030, increase the economic benefits to small island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism).

II. Overview of activities in Nicaragua

A. Framework policies and legislation for sustainable tourism development

6. Nicaragua has developed a national plan to promote human development for the period 2014-2016. Guidelines for the national strategic plan for tourism have also been adopted, promoting a model of tourism development that is sustainable, ethical, humane, participatory, inclusive and respectful of values, customs and traditions. At the Euroferia forum, held in Nicaragua in May 2015, a memorandum of understanding was signed by the Nicaraguan Tourism Bureau, the Nicaraguan Tourism Board and the Nicaraguan Chamber of Micro, Small and Medium-sized Travel Enterprises, aimed at advancing the country's positioning as a sustainable destination and promoting certification in sustainable business practices, including training and awareness-raising activities on environmental issues and climate change.

7. Nicaragua has also improved existing legislative frameworks to foster the development of sustainable tourism, in particular in the areas of protection of biodiversity, natural and cultural heritage, indigenous and/or community development and sustainable consumption and production. The improvements result from the enactment of new legislation, such as a law on sustainable rural tourism and its related regulatory decree and a law declaring the Corn Islands a heritage tourism site.

B. Resilience and protection and conservation measures

8. Nicaragua has established a national system for disaster prevention, mitigation and response that involves public and private institutions dealing with disaster management. It adopts a decentralized and participatory approach, comprising municipal disaster prevention committees that in turn include departmental and municipal tourism offices. Similarly, at the national and departmental levels, the Nicaraguan Tourism Board participates in monitoring and control mechanisms in relation to any eventuality that may affect the country's principal destinations. Domestic tourism is a strategic segment, with a focus on promoting tourism development programmes that underscore the country's cultural, historical and natural heritage. Tourism promotion campaigns are therefore organized to ensure that the local population can enjoy access to leisure and recreational activities and that stakeholders in the sector can diversify and develop products that will be of greatest benefit to the community, socially, economically and culturally.

9. Nicaragua has also introduced new fiscal measures to improve the sustainability of the tourism sector. For example, its tax legislation has been modified to reduce the amount of up-front investment required, thereby fostering the development of more small and medium-sized tourism enterprises.

C. Facilitation of travel and air connectivity

10. The Government has identified air connectivity as a factor limiting the development of tourism and made special efforts to increase investment in aviation

infrastructure, the frequency of flights and the number of routes. Furthermore, new visa policies have been implemented, making the country more accessible to international travellers.

III. Overview of regional initiatives on sustainable tourism and sustainable development

11. Tourism has become a driving force for political and economic integration in Central America, led by the Central American Integration System. As the key institution responsible for the overall regional management of tourism policy, the Central American Tourism Integration Secretariat works closely with the Central American Integration System and other bodies to coordinate tourism policy with other regional integration aspects.

12. In the framework of the Central American Commission on Environment and Development, there is a project, supported by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany, to assist the States members of the Central American Integration System in implementing environmental compensation mechanisms for the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, for the long-term sustainable management and preservation of natural resources (see www.reddccadgiz.org/).

13. The Mesoamerican Reef is a natural, cultural and economic asset to the people of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico. Those four countries collectively protect 35 per cent of their territorial seas and 67 per cent of their coral reef habitats within marine protected areas, in excess of most international targets. Since 2012, they, in cooperation with international agencies and institutions, have been undertaking many initiatives, such as a strategic plan for the conservation of the Mesoamerican Reef region, intended to strengthen the protection of the terrestrial and marine environments, which was launched in 2014.

14. At the regional level, through the Central American Tourism Integration Secretariat and its member States, a strategic plan for sustainable tourism development, covering the period 2014-2018, has been adopted. Various programmes of the plan have been implemented, encompassing such cross-cutting areas as biodiversity protection, cultural and heritage preservation, climate change, indigenous and community development, sustainable consumption and production and safety and security.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

15. Nicaragua has made significant efforts to support the development of sustainable tourism, including the adoption of new legislation and the establishment of fiscal measures to increase competitiveness, improve air connectivity, facilitate the issuance of visas and enhance the protection of biodiversity, cultural heritage and community rights. Furthermore, it has supported the development of national strategies for disaster prevention that engage the tourism sector in a public-private partnership to facilitate monitoring and control mechanisms so as to ensure that the main Nicaraguan

destinations are prepared for any eventuality. Numerous efforts have also been undertaken at the regional level by several bodies.

16. In addition to promoting regional cooperation and enhancing mechanisms for private sector participation, priority should be given to implementing consistent and consolidated global policies for sustainable development. Strengthening collaboration on and alignment of sustainable activities at the national, regional and global levels has the potential to provide effective support for evidence-based policy formulation and scaling up of good practices for the development of sustainable tourism in all its forms and in all States Members of the United Nations. In that respect, the Central American Tourism Integration Secretariat framework can contribute to fostering further engagement at the national, regional and global levels, something that is essential to aligning policies with a universally shared agenda.
